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April 26, 2018

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street Southwest
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

I write to urge the Commission to leave intact reforms made in 2016 to the Lifeline program. These reforms are essential to a critical program to help close the digital divide for low-income Americans.

As you know, the Lifeline modernization and reform in 2016 allowed the existing \$9.25 per month subsidy to be used for broadband Internet access in addition to telephone service. These reforms were projected to help 12 million households currently using their subsidy for phone service to pay their monthly broadband bill, with a goal to get 20 million additional Americans subscribed to high-speed Internet by 2020.

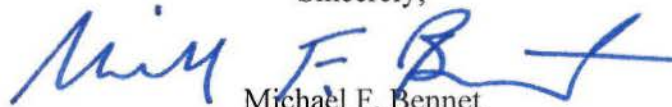
Proposed changes to this program that restrict access to the subsidies or increase bureaucratic hurdles will deny the opportunities provided by the Internet to millions of Americans. These changes would put low-income families, workers, and children, particularly those who live in rural areas, at a significant disadvantage relative to their higher-income peers.

According to recent analysis conducted by Pew Research, just 63 percent of rural adults have a home broadband connection, barely half of American adults with household incomes under \$30,000 have a home broadband connection, and around 5 million school-age children do not have a broadband Internet connection at home.

The digital divide not only perpetuates economic inequality but also a cruel "homework gap," where a lack of reliable broadband at home makes it difficult for students to complete online homework assignments and keep pace with their peers who have Internet access at home. This is especially problematic given that as many as 70 percent of K-12 teachers in the United States assign homework that requires Internet access to complete.

High-speed, reliable, affordable broadband is essential for families to participate in a 21st Century economy and for all of our communities to thrive. I encourage you to reconsider any attempts to limit the Lifeline program's scope or effectiveness. I look forward to continuing to work together to connect and lift up our communities through high-speed, affordable, and reliable broadband access. Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

June 8, 2018

The Honorable Michael F. Bennet
United States Senate
458 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

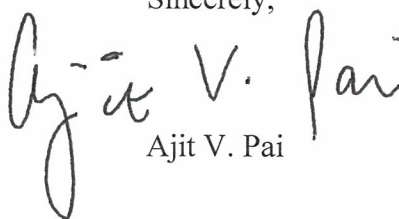
Thank you for your letter regarding the Lifeline program. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and, like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that. This is especially important for the rural adults and students you write about, who all too often have no Internet access at all, let alone affordable access. That is why the Federal Communications Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year and protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice.

At the same time, I am deeply committed to ensuring that the Commission fulfills its obligation to be a responsible steward of the Universal Service Fund. It is critical to strengthen the Lifeline program's efficacy and integrity by reducing the waste, fraud, and abuse that has run rampant in this program for the better part of a decade. For example, GAO discovered 1,234,929 Lifeline subscribers who apparently were not eligible to participate in the program as well as 6,378 individuals who apparently enrolled or recertified after being reported as deceased. That limited sample alone constituted more than \$137 million in abuse each year.

To address this, in a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking accompanying the *Order* the Commission sought comment on a wide variety of measures to improve the administration of the Lifeline program—from re-empowering state commissions to police Lifeline carriers to partnering with states to stand up the National Verifier, from improving program audits to adopting a self-enforcing budget. We are currently reviewing the record that has been compiled in response to that Notice to determine the best path forward, and your letter has been added to that record. Please be assured that we will take into consideration the issues and concerns presented by all stakeholders as the Commission concludes its review.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



Ajit V. Pai